

08-07-2016

Message: The Forces Behind the Conflict

Text: Revelation 12:1-17

Introduction

- A. Overview slide (“The Cycles of Visions in Revelation”). We have worked through the first two cycles of visions Christ has given us of His judgments on a world that opposes Him, the 7 seals followed by the 7 trumpets, both cycles ending in Christ’s victorious second coming, encouraging His persecuted church that in the end, God wins.
- B. I believe the division between the 2nd and 3rd cycles is the easiest to see. In 11:15-19 we see the return of Christ bringing about the final judgment and destruction of unbelievers and the final reward of God’s bond-servants. In 12:1-3 we see the birth and resurrection/exaltation of Jesus Christ. So Revelation chapter 4 and following is not all in the future, nor is it a linear time line (all the visions do not occur in chronological sequence), but involves repeated cycles of history, changing the symbols yet repeating the substance while viewing what is going on in creation from different angles and perspectives (E.g., chapters 12-14 cover roughly the same historical period as chapters 4-8:1 and 8:2 - 11, yet adding the revelation of spiritual forces behind the conflict).

Revelation 11:15 Then **the seventh angel sounded**; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "**The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ***; and He will reign forever and ever." ... ¹⁸ "And the nations were enraged, and **Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.**"

Revelation 12:1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ² and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth ... ⁵ And **she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.**

C. Did you ever wonder why ...

1. Why 2000 years ago did Herod the Great order all baby boys 2 years and younger in the regions of Bethlehem to be slaughtered? Is it all explained by his evil paranoia, or was there more to it?
2. Why did Judas betray Jesus? Was it mere greed or unmet expectations, or did something else dominate his heart?
3. Why was the apostle John exiled to “**the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus**”? Revelation 1:9. Was it just due to a hostile

Roman Empire or was there something more sinister behind it?

4. Why today does the government of Saudi Arabia prohibit non-Muslim religious activities, and regard converting from Islam to Christianity is a crime? Is it simply due to Islamic fundamentalism, or is there another force at work?
 5. Why has our U.S. Supreme Court removed prayer and Bible reading from our public school systems, prohibited creationism to be taught, even as an alternative theory of origins in our public school systems, prohibited 31 states from defining marriage as between one man and one woman? Is the cause simply judicial activism, or is there something darker at work?
- D. God wants us to understand that there is behind the world's conflict with Christ's church and her gospel is a deep spiritual conflict. This conflict, portrayed between a woman and a dragon, dominates chapter 12.
- E. Outline of Revelation 12 (note: use of exodus imagery in chapter 12)
- I. Revelation 12:1-6 The past conflict on earth
 - II. Revelation 12:7-12 The past conflict in heaven
 - III. Revelation 12:13-17 The present and future conflict on earth

I. Revelation 12:1-6 The past conflict on earth

- A. 12:1-2 1st sign: woman clothed with the sun, moon at feet, crown of 12 stars, in labor - a picture of the covenant people of God from whom the Messiah descended.

Revelation 12:1 **A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;² and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.**

1. Symbolism for the church is once again drawn from Israelite imagery. E.g., ...

Genesis 37:9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, **the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.**" 10 He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? **Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?**"

Isaiah 66:8 ... **As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons.**

Galatians 4:26 But **the Jerusalem above** is free; she **is our mother.**

2. The women's children are described as ...

Revelation 12:17 So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war

with the rest of **her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**

Revelation 14:12 Here is the perseverance of **the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

- B. 12:3 2nd sign: great red dragon, 7 heads, 10 horns - symbol of the devil (12:9) who uses the kingdom of this world to wage war against God, Christ, the church.

Revelation 12:3 **Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems.**

Revelation 12:9 And **the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan,** who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

1. Dragon symbolism - using exodus imagery, Egypt was the enemy of God's people, and likened to a dragon (Gk: drakon). In John's day, Rome is like Egypt to God's people.

Ezekiel 29:3 "Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, **Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster (LXX: drakon)** that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, 'My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it.'

2. kingdom of this world symbolism - Satan exerts power through earthly kingdoms

Daniel 7:7 "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth **beast**, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and **it had ten horns.**

Revelation 17:3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet **beast**, full of blasphemous names, having **seven heads and ten horns.** ... 9 "Here is the mind which has wisdom. **The seven heads are seven mountains** on which the woman sits, 10 **and they are seven kings;** five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. ... 12 **"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings** who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

- C. 12:4-5 Behind the earthly conflict during Christ's first appearance on earth is a heavenly conflict. Here in one verse (5) we have the whole of Christ's earthly life summarized, including his birth, resurrection, and exaltation to God's throne.

Revelation 12:4 And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. ⁵ And **she gave birth to a son, a male**

child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

1. God promised His Messiah/Christ that He would inherit the nations and rule them with a rod of iron.

Psalm 2:8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession.⁹ **You shall break them with a rod of iron,** You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

2. Jesus has already identified Himself to the churches as God's Messiah who rules the nations with a rod of iron, and who will share that rule with his people.

Revelation 2:26 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, **TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;**²⁷ **AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON,** AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, **as I also have received authority from My Father;**

- D. 12:6 "Then" a period in the wilderness begins for the woman, symbolized by 1260 days (or 42 months or 3 ½ years. Cf. 11:2,3).

Revelation 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be **nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.**

Revelation 12:14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was **nourished for a time and times and half a time,** from the presence of the serpent.

1. Drawn from the 3 ½ years period predicted in Daniel for the suffering of God's saints and attack on God's temple.

Daniel 7:25 'He will speak out **against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One,** and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and **they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.**

2. This wilderness period in Revelation beginning with the resurrection and ascension of Christ is like that Danielic period in terms of the quality of circumstances of that period - suffering/persecution of the saints, not the quantity of time of that period.

II. Revelation 12:7-12 The past conflict in heaven

- A. 12:7 A parallel time frame to 12:1-6, but showing the heavenly conflict behind the conflict on earth. There is war on earth because there is war in heaven.

Revelation 12:7 **And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,**

- B. 12:8-10 A remarkable victory is won over Satan and his demons with what Christ accomplished with His first coming to earth.

Revelation 12:8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.⁹ **And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.**¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

Luke 10:17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "**I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.**

John 12:31 "**Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.**" 32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

Colossians 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Hebrews 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, **that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,**

- C. 2:11 This defeat of Satan and his fall from status/privilege in heaven is accomplished through the faithfulness of Christ and His witnesses. This verse serves as Christ's exhortation to us - to persevere in faith no matter the cost, knowing Christ's promise of final victory at His return for us. Notice that those who will not be separated from the love of Christ are those who are willing to be considered as sheep to be slaughtered for Christ's sake.

Revelation 12:11 "**And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.**

Romans 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and **fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.**

Romans 8:33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 **Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."** **37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.** 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- D. 12:12 Christ's striving against evil on earth was finished on the cross. Our striving against sin and evil continues until He returns for us. Verse 12 is a prelude warning to the present and near future for the world and Christ's church on earth.

Revelation 12:12 "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. **Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath,** knowing that he has *only* a short time."

III. Revelation 12:13-17 The present and future conflict on earth

- A. 12:13 The church's persecution by Satan results from Christ's victory over Satan.

Revelation 12:13 **And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*.**

- B. 12:14-16 God provides provision and protection of His people from Satan. This knowledge is intended to comfort and encourage us. During this time of persecution, the Lord nourishes, sustains and grows us (James 1:2-4).

Revelation 12:14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, **where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time,** from the presence of the serpent.¹⁵ And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up (katapino) the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

1. the wilderness - a place of protection and temptation, as in the exodus

Deuteronomy 8:15 15 "He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 16 "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

2. eagle's wings

Exodus 19:4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and **how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.**

3. flood - symbol of persecution

Psalms 69:1 **Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life.** 2 I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; **I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.**

Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! 2 **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.**

4. earth swallowed up - an illusion to God swallowing up the pursuing Egyptians in the Red Sea.

Exodus 15:12 "You stretched out Your right hand, **the earth swallowed (LXX: katapino) them.**

Conclusion

- A. The time between Christ's first and second comings is a time of great tribulation for His Church. The earthly conflict between the church and the world is being fueled by a spiritual conflict between God's Christ and the devil. In the end, Christ will return and in that end, God wins.
- B. But in this time of conflict the Lord will nourish us, sustain us, and grow us into His own image. Jesus is reminding us that the source of the opposition and persecution that His body experiences is much deeper and darker than what can be seen with natural eyes. Christ has graciously revealed to us the spiritual conflict behind the conflict on earth, exhorting us - don't become fearful, disillusioned, or faint. Rather, ...

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, **be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.** ¹¹ **Put on the full armor of God,** so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore, **take up the full armor of God,** so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and **having done everything, to stand firm.**